The Strange Case of MARY PAGE

The Great McClure Mystery Story, Written by FREDERICK LEWIS In Collaboration With JOHN T. M'INTYRE, Author of the Ashton Kirk Detective Stories. *Read the Story and See the Essanay Moving Pictures*

SYNOPSIS.

Mary Page, actress, is accused of the murder of James Pollock and is defended by her lover, Philip Langdon. Pollock was intoxicated. At Mary's trial she admits she had the revolver. Her maid testifies that Mary threatened Pollock with it previously, and Mary's leading man implicates Langdon. How Mary disappeared from the scene of the crime is a mystery. Brandon tells of a strange hand print he saw on Mary's shoulder. Further evidence shows that horror of drink produces temporary insanity in Mary. The defense is "repressed psychosis." Witnesses describe Mary's flight from her intoxicated father and her father's suicide. Nurse Walton describes the kidnaping of Mary by Pollock, and Amy Barton tells of Mary's struggles to become an actress, of Pollock's pursuit of her and of another occasion when the smell of liquor drove Mary insane. There is evidence that Daniels, Mary's manager, threatened Pollock. Mary faints on the stand and again goes insane when a policeman offers her whisky.

POLLOCK'S THREAT.

THE green shaded lamp flung a wide pool of mellow light over the scattered papers on the table and brought out boyish flints in Langdon's dark head as it lay n his folded arms, sunk in ineffable weariness.

All through the long hours of the ight he had kept his lonely vigil—now oring over the legal documents on the ble, now pacing the floor in a frenzy anxiety, or making his way down e echoing corridors to look in with ute suffering at the room where Dr. oster and Nurse Walton watched so ilently beside a moaning, twitching gure on a narrow prison bed. But hen the scanty furniture of the office vas gradually emerging from the enveloping cloak of night into visible ugliness he had at last sunk into a doze of complete exhaustion. Miss Walton, coming to the door, an eager message on her lips, turned silently and pityingly away. Some betraying sound reached him, however, and he lifted his head with a start, blinking to find the lamplight paling before the gray of morning.

Yawning, he got to his feet and rossed to the window. He flung it yide and drew in great breaths of the hill air.

For the first time since Mary's attack of madness in the courtroom he realized fully how tremendous an asset the tragedy was to the defense, and in spite of his grief, as a lover, over her suffering, the lawyer in him exulted in the episode which cemented to place the cornerstone of his case.

The thought of this lent a hint of uoyancy to his tired body as he made nother trip to the cell where, at Dr oster's orders, they had carried Mary. ill screaming with frenzy.

Mary herself was sleeping soundly hen he glanced into the cell, and Dr oster was on his feet, frankly stretching, while Miss Walton was bathing her ed eyes at the basin in the corner.

Both greeted him with a smile, and. nswering the question in his eyes ther than the one he huskily whisered with his lips, Dr. Foster said:

"She will be all right now. She oke, conscious, just after your last isit and is now sleeping soundly. here's nothing to worry about—at ast, not just at present."

"Thank God!" Langdon's voice broke the words, and Dr. Foster put out hand and patted the shoulder of younger man reassuringly, saying:

We all say that, but you'd better go some rest now; you look done up."

Oh, I'm all right," said Langdon. ut, Doctor, is she—is it going to be ssible to go on with this trial? Can ary bear it?"

"I think so." The answer came slow-

"Of course yesterday's scene was d, very bad. But you must realize at the attack, while it was plainly e to the whiskey thrust upon her, s only to some extent brought about the fact that the liquor was handher at a time when she was hysical and had been re-enacting events t kept her earlier experiences conntly in her mind. Given healthy roundings and happiness, I wouldn't ry about attacks in the future."

ngdon nodded absently, for his rt was echoing the earlier words of great alienist: "Given healthy surndings and happiness I wouldn't ry about attacks in the future," he was vowing to himself that, what it might, he would yet win dom and happiness for her.

had not dared hope that she ld be well enough for the trial to tinue for some days at least, but n she woke a few hours later she d she was perfectly able to go ourt even then. And so, no more an hour late, the proceedings ontinued.

hour had seemed a very short o Mary and to Langdon, but it very long one to the excited tators who crowded the rooms to doors, whispering excited reminisces of the day before.

Whatever doubts had lingered in the minds of the public as to the veracity and the strength of the defense built up by Langdon had been shattered at one blow. For Mary, as everyone said, might indeed have been actress enough to feign madness at the sight of the drunken policeman, but she could not have feigned that great bruise on her shoulder. The shadow of the gripping hand with those livid scars beneath it told mutely of how the cruel fingers had torn into the tender flesh.

The newspaper bearing Dr. Foster's article on "Repressed Psychosis" which the District Attorney had so sarcastically introduced as evidence had been pored over by every juryman, and from coast to coast the dramatic story

She Came In, Very Pale, Very Wan, but Serenely Calm and Smiling.

of the scene in court was the one subject at the breakfast table of rich and poor alike.

It seemed incredible to those who had watched the frenzied, screaming woman carried out the day before that she could ever regain her sanity. When she came in, very pale, very wan, but serenely calm and smiling, nothing but the fear of being shut out from the final scenes of the great drama kept the crowds from wild applause.

The prosecutor alone did not look at her. He felt at that moment almost as if he hated her with personal vindictiveness. For he, too, had had an all-night vigil, seeking some ruse or legal technicality that would keep the events of the day before out of the records of the case. He knew only too well that any jury, having seen Mary's seizure, would be readily convinced that she might have suffered in the same fashion on the night when James Pollock was killed, and that if they were convinced of that, proving Mary's guilt was going to be the hardest struggle he had ever known.

In consequence the opening hours of court were marked by a series of bitter wrangles during which even his honor lost his temper, and the restlessness of the spectators became open disorder. But for all his acidity of wit and skill at argument it was a losing fight that the District Attorney waged. He was conscious of that himself. Therefore it came as no surprise when it was at last brought summarily to an end by the judge, who ordered the testimony of the policeman as to Mary's madness entered as evidence.

With a long breath of relief Langdon turned back toward his seat, suddenly becoming conscious that he was holding a crumpled scrap of paper which the bailiff had thrust into his hand some moments before. He remembered now that the court officer had said something when he gave it to him, but he hadn't caught the words, and it was with entire indifference that he opened the note and read the hastily scrawled words. But at the sight of them indifference gave place to excitement. Crumpling the paper up in his hand, he turned sharply to the bailiff.

"Call George Brennan!" he said, and there was triumph in his tones.

Brennan was the same cleancut young detective who had told of the disappearance of Daniels, and the first question asked him revealed what had been in the note.

"Mr. Brennan, I have just received a message which says that you have found Mr. Daniels. Will you tell the court, please, the circumstances of the finding of the missing man?"

"Well, it wasn't exactly a case of 'finding' him," said the detective, with a smile. "You see—he just came home! I was hanging around the apartment house in case anyone brought a message to Mrs. Daniels when I saw him come into the vestibule. He had a three days' growth of beard on his face, and his clothes were all mussed up as if he'd been sleeping in them. He looked like a bum after a three days' jag, but I had no trouble recognizing him."

"Did he seem excited—or anxious to get into the building without being seen?"

"No. He moved slowly, as if he was dazed. He hesitated quite a while before he rang the bell of his apartment, but as soon as he'd pushed it he got impatient, and kept calling, 'Hello!' up the speaking tube, and when someone answered he said 'Open the door quick! It's me—your father.' When the latch clicked he went in, but he made no effort to close the door after him, so I followed. Both Mrs. Daniels and the daughter were in the doorway of the apartment to meet him, and while they were kissing and hugging him I walked in."

"Did Daniels seem startled at the sight of you?"

"No. He seemed sort of stupid as if he was sleepy, but when Mrs. Daniels told him I was a detective and that he was wanted as a witness in the Page trial he woke up fast enough and got very excited. He said he had nothing to tell and wouldn't accept service of any subpoena. 'I don't know anything,' he kept saying, and when I asked him where he had been he said he'd been on a little spree to forget his business troubles."

"Did you tell him he would have to appear in court?"

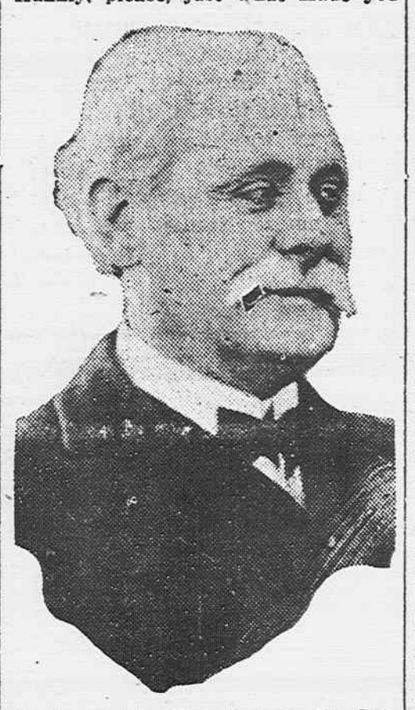
"Yes. But it wasn't what I told him about the law, but what his wife said that seemed to convince him. She told him she had every faith in him, and that what he had to tell wouldn't do any harm, and for him to go. So he said he would if I'd give him time to wash up."

"Is Mr. Daniels in court now?"

"Yes, sir. He is in the witness room."

A stir of excitement swept through the room, but deepened to an ominous whisper of suspicion when, Brennan dismissed, the bailiff summoned the former manager of Mary Page. For Daniels slunk into the room with an ashen face and trembling hands. Great beads of sweat stood out visibly on his forehead, and his voice when he took the oath was husky and uncertain. If ever guilt was written large upon any man, it was apparently written upon the erstwhile jaunty theatrical manager. The judge, studying him with eyes psychologically keen, wished he had the full papers of this case before him to learn more of this new witness, and inwardly vowed a recess to study them should the evidence take any unexpected turn. Daniels, however, recovered some measure of self-control under the preliminary questioning and gave his occupation as "manager of the Covington Theatre" with a hint of pompousness, but Langdon's next question brought the startled look back into his eyes.

"Mr. Daniels, you say you knew the defendant well and that you starred her in 'The Seekers.' Will you tell us frankly, please, just what made you



"I starred Miss Page because Jim Pollock said he would put up the money."

select Miss Page for the leading role of the new play and what share James Pollock had in your decision?"

For an instant Daniels hesitated and cast a furtive look at Mary. Then, clearing his throat, he said with a hint of brusqueness:

"Well, I guess it's no secret now. I starred Miss Page because Jim Pollock said he would put up the money to back the show if I would give her the chance."

Mary gave an involuntary gasp of dismay, and again Daniels shot a furtive glance in her direction as Langdon asked:

"Did Miss Page know of this?"

"Of course not. I told her that I had seen her work in stock and thought she was a good actress."

"What agreement did you have with Mr. Pollock regarding his attention to Miss Page?"

"None. That wasn't my business. That was up to him. All I asked was fair play, and that he should stick to me even if Miss Page turned him down. I knew she didn't like him."

"Isn't it true that you had a quarrel with Mr. Pollock as early in your partnership as the day Miss Page signed her contract?"

"Yes, it's true. James was mad because you had been called in by Miss Page to look over her contract. He said you were butting in where Miss Page was concerned, and he wanted me to keep you away from the theater."

Langdon flushed and frowned.

"Please remember, Mr. Daniels," he said harshly, "that you are addressing the court and not me personally. I request, your honor, that the name 'Mr. Langdon' be substituted for the word 'you,' as used by the witness."

"Your request is granted," said the judge, who was still narrowly studying Daniels.

"Was that first day the only time you and Mr. Pollock quarreled about financial support for the play in case Miss Page left the company?" The question was quietly asked, but pregnant with a meaning that brought the blood into Daniels's face.

"No, it wasn't," he snapped. "When I found how dead set Miss Page was against him, I knew he wasn't going to win out in that game. I tried to make my position safe, but he wouldn't promise anything, unless I promised to arrange things so that you—I mean Mr. Langdon—was denied admission to the theatre."

"When did you have the last quarrel on that subject with Mr. Pollock?"

"On the day that 'The Seekers' opened."

With an abrupt gesture Langdon caught up the sheet of paper on which were pasted the torn scraps of the note to Pollock and held it up before the witness.

"Mr. Daniels, did you write that letter to Mr. Pollock?"

"My God! Where did you get that?" The cry was a confession, but Langdon repeated his question, and this time Daniels said with sudden sullenness:

"Yes, I wrote it."

"When?"

"The day 'The Seekers' opened. There—had been a scene in Miss Page's dressing room, and—and—I was afraid the show would be queered if Pollock didn't let the girl alone."

"Why didn't you finish it?"

"Because"— Daniels hesitated and moistened his dry lips with a nervous tongue. "because—I—I—thought it sounded pretty raw, and I'd better let things go till I saw Pollock that night."

Again the ominous little murmur that meant suspicion crept through the room, and Daniels shuddered, gripping the sides of his chair to hide the trembling of his hands as Langdon turned to the stenographer and said quietly:

"Mr. Wilson, will you be kind enough to turn to the testimony of the bellboy, 'Joe,' as given yesterday and read it, beginning with the words, 'was there anyone in the hallway when you looked back?'"

There was a slight rustling of papers, when the clear voice of the stenographer rang out.

"Question: Was there anyone in the hallway when you looked back? Answer: Yes. The fat man who had been at the banquet, the one they called Mr. Daniels. Question: What was he doing? Answer: He was standing close to the door of the gray suite with his ear against it, as if he was listening."

"That will do, Mr. Wilson. Now will you please turn to the testimony of Randall Williams, and read the testimony beginning with the words, 'Where were you when you heard the shot?'"

"Question: Where were you when you heard the shot? Answer: Just outside the door of the banquet room. Question: What did you do? Answer: I ran down the hall in the direction from which the sound came. Question: Did you meet anyone? Answer: Yes. I ran bang into Daniels at the corner where the corridor turned. I nearly upset him, I guess, for he caught at my arm and held on as if to steady himself. Question:"—

"That will do, thank you," cried Langdon sharply. "And now, Mr. Daniels, will you tell us what you did when you overheard the voices of Miss Page and Mr. Pollock talking in the gray suite and why you were so agitated when you met Mr. Williams?"

"Because," the voice of the manager rose to a sudden scream, "because I thought he had killed them both—as he had threatened to do!"

In an instant the prosecutor was on his feet, but, quick as he was, the judge was quicker. The unexpected turn HAD come in the evidence, and his honor briefly announced a thirty minute recess.

Had HE been the stage manager, rather than Daniels, he could not have chosen a more dramatic moment to bring the testimony to its temporary close.

Every man and woman among the spectators was keyed to the highest tension by the swiftly moving events, and to drop from these heights to the flatness of mere waiting strained patience to the breaking point. The scraping of chairs along the floor, the shuffling of feet, the waves of shrill whispering question and comment—all the sounds of restless humanity replaced the tense silence which had gone before—and when at last the clock had ticked out its slow half hour and the bailiff brought Daniels back to the witness stand there was an audible sigh of relief from the spectators that under any other circumstances would have won a laugh from Langdon.

Now, however, he was too intent upon the possibilities that lay behind Daniels' startling statement to be even conscious of the audience that was watching with such avid curiosity the enactment of this drama. He was more than thankful to the judge whose hasty recess had momentarily stopped the protest from the prosecutor, and it was with a rush of relief that he saw the latter take his seat when court reopened and realized that, after all, Daniels's statement was to pass without a legal wrangle. It made his first question an easy one.

"Mr. Daniels, you say that you had heard Mr. Pollock threaten to kill the defendant and himself. Will you tell the court when that threat was made and to whom?"

"It was made to me, on an occasion when I almost became an unwitting accomplice in a murder, during the rehearsals of 'The Seekers.'"

"Whose murder?"

"Mr. Langdon's."

A startled sob caught at Mary's throat at the words and, lifting her head, she looked at Langdon with such an expression in her eyes that for a

A Startled Sob Caught at Mary's Throat.

moment he forgot the court, the judge and the witness on the stand, and knew only, with a blinding rush of joy, that whatever happened—she loved him. That realization was surging through Mary herself at the moment, and she felt as if she were seeing him for the first time—truly and fairly.

The protective maternal instinct that is always the real keystone of a woman's deeper love came to the fore for the first time and was followed by a swift fierce gladness that James Pollock was dead! Whatever the tragedy and the suffering that enmeshed her, at least Philip was safe, and at the thought all the fear and the horror of the law left her, and she drew a long happy breath that was almost a mute paean of gladness that it was she who could pay for his safety.

Langdon himself was equally shaken by the wonderful little interlude that had come like a streak of sunshine through the dreary gloom of the court scene, but those about him attributed the unsteadiness of his voice to excitement, and only Mary guessed the real reason and flushed rosily under her own thoughts.

"Mr. Daniels." Langdon was asking in that strange, choked voice, "will you please tell the court the circumstances of the—the attempt upon my life?"

"I didn't know it was, you know," protested Daniels. "I understood it was just to be a kidnapping—to—to get you—Mr. Langdon, I mean—out of the way till after the opening of 'The Seekers.'"

"You say 'just a kidnapping,' Mr. Daniels," broke in the judge harshly. "Did you not know that the law does not consider 'kidnapping' a light offence?"

"Yes, I know." Daniels's voice was husky and uncertain. "I knew, but—all I had was invested in this new play, and if James Pollock had pulled out then, I'd have lost it all and—I've got a wife and daughter. I didn't think any harm would come to Mr. Langdon; in fact, Mr. Pollock promised it wouldn't, or I'd never have let that man Shale take the watchman's place."

"When was that?"

"During the rehearsals, as I said. Jim came to me and said that Philip Langdon was butting in too much, that he was upsetting Miss Page and making trouble for him—that is Pollock—and he wanted him out of the way. Then he said he had a plan to kidnap Langdon and take him out to the country till after the opening of the play. At first I wouldn't listen, but—finally I—did. It sounded simple enough. I was to send for Langdon late that night, supposedly to ask him something about the Page contract. In the meantime we were to drug the watchman and let Shale—Pollock's jackal, they call him, you know—take his place. Then when Mr. Langdon was leaving the watchman was to nab him and carry him out to a waiting automobile and cart him off."

"Were these plans carried out?"

"No. That is, not the latter part. It was then that I found out about the attempt at murder."

"Will you tell the court in detail just what happened on that night?"

"Well, I—I sent for Mr. Langdon," said Daniels nervously, "and he came. In the meantime we had given the regular watchman knockout drops and left him in a corner of the balcony, and Shale took his place. When Mr. Langdon was leaving I called this supposed watchman and, acting on Jim's instructions, told him to show Mr. Langdon out of the stage door. But I tell you"—his voice rose suddenly to a high, shrill note of hysterical emphasis—"I tell you I knew nothing of that open trap door in the stage. I thought he was going to take him right out of the theatre. And when I heard Mr. Langdon's cry—I—I was too startled to move for a minute. Then I rushed down and turned on the stage lights."

"Will you tell us what you saw?"

"I saw Mr. Langdon hanging to the edge of an open trap that led down some thirty feet to the cement cellar below, and Shale standing to one side, with a black-jack in his hand. I thought he was going to hit Langdon, and I snatched it away from him and dragged Langdon back upon the stage. The very first words he said made me realize he didn't know the real reason of that open trap, so I hid the black-jack behind me and took Mr. Langdon to the door myself and saw him safely away."

"Did you see Mr. Pollock again that night?"

"Yes. When I got back to the stage I found him there denouncing Shale for having failed to do his part, and when I asked him if he had meant murder, he said, 'Yes!' I meant to have him killed through an apparent accident—more or less. I tell you here and now, that I'll kill Mary Page and I'll kill myself, before Langdon shall win her!' That's what Jim Pollock said, and that's what I thought he had done—that night. I SWEAR I didn't go into that room! But I heard them quarrel, and I heard the scream and the shot. And I thought he'd done it—and I ran away, in sheer horror—that's all! My God! You must believe me. It's true that I quarreled with Jim Pollock, not once, but many times. It's true that he didn't play fair with me, but can't you see that I had everything to lose and nothing to gain by his death! It's meant ruin to me—and ruin to my wife and little girl."

His voice broke pitifully over the last words. Leaning forward, he buried his face in his shaking hands, waiting for the next question. But it didn't come. That tragic outburst had carried conviction, not merely to Langdon but to everyone in the room, and whatever shadows of suspicion had hung over Mr. Daniels faded before the pitiful but indubitable veracity of his story. The mystery, if mystery it was, of James Pollock's death was still as impenetrable, and the cords of the law that for a time seemed to be loosening from about Mary Page, had tightened again.

But to Mary and Langdon that testimony of the manager had brought something that for the time at least seemed greater than the law—an understanding of Mary's heart, vision of what might yet be if freedom could be won for her.

It was a strange moment for a great love to find expression, and a strange story which had wakened it; and, while Langdon felt deep in his heart that no words were needed after that glance of Mary's he could not forbear following her to her cell when court had adjourned. She glanced up at him with sudden shyness when he came in, and her hands went out waveringly, but whether to hold him off or to cling she could not herself have told. Langdon had no doubts, however, and caught them close in his warm grasp and drew her to him in a silence more eloquent than words. Then, stooping till his cheek lay against her hair, he whispered unsteadily:

"Mary, when Daniels told of James Pollock's attempt on my life, your eyes said something to me that they have never said before. Did you mean it, dear?" Then, as she clung to him mutely, he laughed softly and added:

"I know you did. You can never deny it now, my darling, and when all this is over, I am going to ask you a

"I—I think you'd better go now, please, Phil!"

question—and—and make you put into words what your eyes told me today. May I, Mary?"

For an instant she swayed against him, her head buried in his shoulder, then with a sad little sob she drew back.

"That's all such a long, long way in the future, Phil," she said wearily. "Oh, let's not even think of it. There are so many things in between."

"Dear!" he cried in sudden pity, and would have taken her in his arms again, but she shook her head and turned away, saying unsteadily:

"I—I think you'd better go now, please, Phil! I'm so tired."

"Of course," he answered quickly, contrition in his voice. "I was a brute to bother you now. Only, I wanted you to know, dear, that whatever happens my love is around you, and I will protect you—with my life, if need be." Catching up one of her slender little hands, he crushed it against his lips. Then he was gone.

[To be continued.]